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ABSTRACT

The Beginning Teacher Assistance Program was adopted by the Virginia Board of Education to ensure that teachers certified by the state demonstrate the minimum competencies necessary to perform satisfactorily. The first section of this booklet describes the program's assessment component and lists the 14 competencies teachers are expected to demonstrate. The competencies fall into the areas of: academic learning time; student accountability; clarity of lesson structure; individual differences; evaluation; consistent rules; affective climate; learner self-concept; meaningful learning; planning; questioning skills; reinforcement; close supervision; and awareness. The observation process is also described. The second section describes the assistance component of the program and answers questions regarding who receives assistance, how assistance is provided, length of instructional sessions, session organization, and session attendance. (CB)

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BEGINNING TEACHER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

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BEGINNING TEACHER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Background

In February 1982 the Virginia Board of Education adopted requirements affecting initial certification and continuing professional certification of Virginia's teachers. The Board's requirements that are pertinent to the Virginia Beginning Teacher Assistance Program (BTAP) are as follows:

1. Effective July 1, 1985, first-time applicants for teacher certification in Virginia were required to obtain a two-year nonrenewable teaching certificate.

2. To receive a five-year renewable Collegiate Professional Certificate, beginning teachers must demonstrate satisfactory performance in the classroom within a two-year provisional period.

The two goals of BTAP are:

(a) To provide assurance that every teacher who receives the Collegiate Professional Certificate possesses specified competencies;

(b) To assist beginning teachers in developing these competencies. Teachers who are unable to demonstrate the required competencies will not be eligible to receive the Collegiate Professional Certificate.

Satisfactory demonstration of the competencies required by BTAP is only one of several requirements that must be met to obtain a Collegiate Professional Certificate.

BTAP is concerned only with the responsibility of the state to ensure that each individual who is granted the Collegiate Professional Certificate has demonstrated the minimum competencies necessary to meet state certification requirements. Eligibility for continuing employment and the determination of successful teaching are the responsibilities of local school divisions as a part of their employment policies.

BTAP is not designed to guarantee that a teacher will perform satisfactorily on the job but to establish, through observation, that the teacher possesses the professional knowledge needed to perform satisfactorily. Since functional knowledge cannot be demonstrated on a paper-and-pencil test, the BTAP competencies must be assessed by observing teachers' classroom behavior as early as possible.

THE ASSESSMENT COMPONENT

WHAT ARE THE COMPETENCIES THAT TEACHERS WILL BE EXPECTED TO DEMONSTRATE?

Listed below are the 14 competencies which beginning teachers should possess if they are to satisfy the assessment component of BTAP.

1. ACADEMIC LEARNING TIME

The competent teacher knows that learning is directly related to the time students spend on learning activities.

The beginning teacher should demonstrate awareness of the importance of the effective use of learning time by:

- minimizing time spent on noninstructional activities
- keeping the student involved in assigned tasks
- keeping attention focused on the lesson
- planning initial learning activities

2. STUDENT ACCOUNTABILITY

The competent teacher knows the importance of holding students responsible for completing assigned tasks.

The beginning teacher should demonstrate knowledge of the importance of student accountability by:

- planning the tasks that each student is expected to complete
- making students understand what they are expected to accomplish
- explaining the consequences of not completing an assigned task
- making certain that students work on their tasks
- making certain that assigned tasks are completed

3. CLARITY OF LESSON STRUCTURE

The competent teacher knows that the lesson should be presented in a systematic manner consistent with the objectives of instruction. Research shows that students learn best when they understand how each part of the learning activity relates to the other parts and to the whole concept.

The beginning teacher should demonstrate knowledge of the importance of clarity in the structure of a lesson by:

- preparing outlines, reviews, and summaries in advance of the classroom sessions
- beginning the lesson or unit with a statement of purpose
- helping students to understand the relationship between one part of a lesson and another
- ending the lesson with a summary or review

4. INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

The competent teacher knows that learners progress at different speeds, learn in different ways, and respond to different kinds of motivation. Research indicates that teaching strategies should be adapted to these differences.

The beginning teacher should demonstrate knowledge of the importance of adapting to individual differences by:

- planning ways of dealing with differences in students' abilities, cultural backgrounds, or handicaps
- defining different objectives for different students
- providing alternative ways for students to achieve common objectives
- providing for learners with special problems, such as hearing or visual impairment or severe learning difficulties
- providing for learners with unusual talents or abilities
- arranging the classroom for easy access for physically handicapped students

5. EVALUATION

The competent teacher knows that learning is facilitated when instructional objectives are communicated to students and when those objectives coincide with the objectives of evaluation. Important information about individual student progress can be obtained informally in the classroom and can be used in making tactical teaching decisions. Additionally, formal assessment of each student's progress is important in making decisions about instruction, grading, and promotion.

The beginning teacher should demonstrate knowledge of the importance of formal and informal evaluation by:

- planning evaluation (formal and informal) whenever he or she plans instruction
- designing formal evaluation procedures
- asking questions, observing students' work, and checking students' progress regularly
- informing students about how their performance will be evaluated

6. CONSISTENT RULES

The competent teacher knows that rules for classroom behavior must be clear and consistent, and that students must understand the rules and the consequences of violating them.

The beginning teacher should demonstrate knowledge of the importance of consistency in enforcing rules by:

- setting rules that are understood by students
- citing the rule when students disobey it

7. AFFECTIVE CLIMATE

The competent teacher knows that learning occurs more readily in a classroom environment that is nonpunitive and reflects acceptance of students' behavior.

The beginning teacher should demonstrate knowledge of the importance of a psychologically supportive emotional climate in the classroom by:

- avoiding hostility and a punitive environment
- acting in a relaxed, good-humored way, and accepting students' behavior
- showing consideration for students
- showing awareness and appreciation of cultural differences
- making the physical environment as attractive as possible

8. LEARNER SELF-CONCEPT

The competent teacher knows that a student's achievement may be enhanced by improving his or her self-concept; the student's self-concept is enhanced if the teacher's expectations are high and if the teacher appreciates the student's personal worth.

The beginning teacher should demonstrate knowledge of the importance of enhancing students' self-concepts by:

- planning challenging lessons
- encouraging and prompting a student who has difficulty in answering questions correctly
- praising students when they perform difficult tasks or give correct answers to difficult questions
- showing courtesy to students

9. MEANINGFUL LEARNING

The competent teacher knows that learning takes place when the material to be learned is related to material already learned.

The beginning teacher should demonstrate knowledge of the importance of meaningful learning activites by:

- planning ways of relating instruction to the interests and knowledge of students
- pointing out relationships between what is being taught and what the student already knows
- pointing out relationships between what is being taught and the "real world" interests of students
- asking questions that require students to identify relationships between what they are learning and what they already know
- asking questions of students that require them to identify relationships between what they are learning and something that is important to them outside the classroom
- relating instruction to the cultural backgrounds of students

10. PLANNING

The competent teacher knows the importance of good planning and is aware that: (1) learning activities should match the instructional objectives; (2) learning is facilitated when ideas are communicated in several different ways; (3) the current literature on the teaching profession should be consulted regularly; and (4) students' scores on standardized tests contain important and useful information about the class as a group and about individual students.

The beginning teacher should demonstrate knowledge of the importance of good planning by:

- using test data in defining objectives or choosing learning activities and materials
- using professional literature in defining objectives or choosing learning activities
- defining objectives that will assist students in achieving long-term goals
- defining objectives on the basis of differing needs of groups and individuals
- defining objectives in measurable terms
- using information about test reliability and validity
- using objectives as a basis for planning learning activities
- planning different activities for students with different abilities, interests, and cultural backgrounds
- planning alternative ways for students to achieve the same objectives
- planning for the use of a variety of instructional media
- planning more than one way to present material to students

11. QUESTIONING SKILL

The competent teacher knows how to ask questions to develop students' knowledge, and recognizes that asking questions is a major professional teaching tool.

The beginning teacher should demonstrate knowledge of the importance of skillful questioning by:

conducting drill or practice sessions that include

- asking relatively easy questions to which the teacher expects one specific answer, with little or no probing or follow-up (convergent questions)

conducting classroom discussion by

- asking questions to which the teacher does not expect one particular answer (divergent questions)

- redirecting a question in which the teacher repeats or rephrases the question to another student
- accepting learners' answers

conducting recitations by

- asking questions that are mostly convergent or probing, or extending a question relating to student reponse
- giving positive or negative feedback on students' answers

developing new content by

- using convergent and probing questions rather than divergent questions
- giving positive feedback or praise when a difficult question is answered

12. REINFORCEMENT

The competent teacher demonstrates awareness that the skillful use of reinforcement encourages or discourages particular behaviors.

The beginning teacher should demonstrate knowledge of this competency and its application to classroom teaching by:

- giving positive feedback
- avoiding using punishment to motivate students
- calling attention to desirable behaviors

13. CLOSE SUPERVISION

The competent teacher knows that students learn more during individual and small-group activities when the activities are monitored and the teacher assists and encourages each student.

The beginning teacher should demonstrate knowledge of the importance of close supervision of students when they are working as individuals or in small groups by:

- monitoring their activities
- helping students who have problems

14. AWARENESS

The competent teacher knows that effective classroom management requires that the teacher knows what is occurring in the classroom and that students are aware of this fact.

The beginning teacher should demonstrate knowledge of the importance of this competency by:

- moving about the classroom or constantly scanning it
- constantly monitoring the level of interest of students
- making students aware that the teacher knows what is going on

WHO WILL OBSERVE THESE COMPETENCIES?

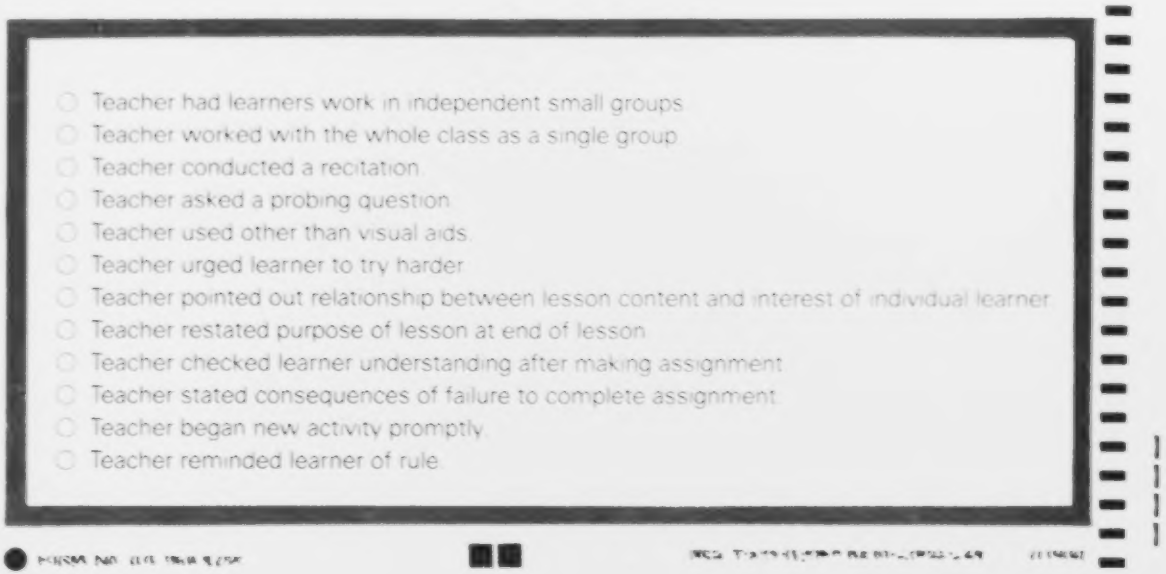
The BTAP program involves the use of experienced educators—classroom observers—who are trained to observe the beginning teachers on 14 competencies.

HOW WILL THE OBSERVERS DO THEIR JOB?

Each BTAP observer is trained to recognize certain kinds of behaviors that are listed on a special observation instrument. Before any person is allowed to observe teachers, he or she will be required to demonstrate the ability to observe and record information accurately and objectively. The BTAP observer will not be an evaluator; the observer will not be expected to evaluate or judge whether a behavior that occurs is appropriate or inappropriate, but only to record whether or not it occurred.

WHAT SPECIFIC BEHAVIORS WILL THE OBSERVER BE LOOKING FOR AND HOW WILL THEY BE RECORDED?

The behaviors will be listed on an Opscan sheet on which the observer will indicate his or her findings. The information recorded is confidential, but the following items are similar to those found on the Opscan sheet.


Teacher had learners work in independent small groups
Teacher worked with the whole class as a single group
Teacher conducted a recitation
Teacher asked a probing question
Teacher used other than visual aids
Teacher urged learner to try harder
Teacher pointed out relationship between lesson content and interest of individual learner
Teacher restated purpose of lesson at end of lesson
Teacher checked learner understanding after making assignment
Teacher stated consequences of failure to complete assignment
Teacher began new activity promptly
Teacher reminded learner of rule

HOW MANY TIMES WILL A BEGINNING TEACHER BE OBSERVED IN BTAP?

Beginning teachers will be observed three times by three assigned observers during the fall of the first year of teaching. Three observations comprise an assessment. If the teacher meets the requirements during the first assessment, no further observations are necessary. If he or she does not meet the requirements, assistance will be provided for the teacher before the second assessment period in the spring of the first year. If BTAP requirements are not met during the second assessment period, additional assistance will be provided. The teacher will be assessed a third time during the fall of the second year. If the teacher fails to meet requirements during the three assessment periods, the performance score will be reviewed before a final decision is made. Normally, no further assistance will be offered and no additional assessment will be made.

HOW WILL THE OBSERVERS' VISITS TO THE CLASSROOM BE ARRANGED?

A teacher will be assigned a time period (approximately 10 working days) within which the classroom observations should be made. The teacher will be assigned three individuals who will conduct the observations. The observers and the teacher will arrange a time for the observer to visit the classroom.

DOES IT MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE WHAT TYPE OF CLASS IS OBSERVED?

The teacher is encouraged to select a lesson which he or she believes most effectively demonstrates knowledge and mastery of the teaching competencies. The teacher should see that the observers are given an opportunity to witness different kinds of instructional activities.

HOW WILL THE OBSERVER KNOW THE TEACHER'S LESSON PLANS DURING THE OBSERVATION?

Prior to each observation, the teacher will complete *The Class Context Planning Information Form* which will supply information about his or her class. The completed form will be given to the observer immediately *before* the beginning of the observation period.

WHAT TYPES OF QUESTIONS ARE ON THE CLASS CONTEXT PLANNING INFORMATION FORM?

This form asks for information about such things as class status, student status, and the teacher's plan for instruction. This information will be used, together with the observation report, to determine a total assessment score.

WHEN WILL THE BEGINNING TEACHER KNOW THE RESULTS OF THE FIRST ASSESSMENT?

Teachers will be notified of the results of the first assessment at the end of the fall assessment period.

THE ASSISTANCE COMPONENT

WHO RECEIVES ASSISTANCE?

Within the first few weeks of employment, all teachers receive materials about BTAP which were developed especially for the program. These materials include the publication, *Assisting the Beginning Teacher*, which is designed to help beginning teachers satisfy the assessment phase of the program and to provide professional knowledge and skills. A second publication, *Beginning Teacher's Handbook*, views the teacher as a problem solver and examines the methods that must be used in solving instructional problems during the first year on the job.

HOW IS ASSISTANCE PROVIDED?

Assistance is structured and delivered through 14 instructional sessions. Each session focuses on one of the 14 competencies and corresponds to the material contained in the publication, *Assisting the Beginning Teacher*. Each section of the publication defines a competency, provides background knowledge about it, and presents practice activities related to it.

HOW LONG IS EACH INSTRUCTIONAL SESSION?

Each of the 14 assistance sessions is designed for approximately two and one-half hours.

HOW IS EACH SESSION ORGANIZED?

Each session concentrates on one competency and is divided into three parts. During the first section, the competency is explained and discussed. The second section provides examples of how teachers can demonstrate the competency in their classrooms. The third section is devoted to microteaching where participants practice using the competency and receive specific comments for performance improvement.

WHICH SESSIONS SHOULD BEGINNING TEACHERS ATTEND?

Teachers who are unable to demonstrate all 14 competencies during the first assessment period will be informed by the Department of Education regarding the competencies they have successfully demonstrated and those competencies they have not yet demonstrated. Although all teachers are encouraged to attend as many of the assistance sessions as possible, they should plan to attend those sessions that deal with the competencies they have not successfully demonstrated.

HOW WILL BEGINNING TEACHERS BE NOTIFIED OF THE SESSION SCHEDULES?

The BTAP Regional Center Director will notify teachers in each region of the dates, times, and locations of the assistance sessions they will need to attend.

WILL ATTENDANCE AT THE SESSIONS BE REQUIRED?

Teachers are strongly encouraged to attend the sessions. These sessions will ultimately increase their chances to satisfy the second assessment and to meet all BTAP requirements.

WHO WILL TEACH THE ASSISTANCE SESSIONS?

Experienced educators who have been specially prepared are employed to teach the BTAP assistance sessions. These educators are called assistance instructors.

WILL ASSISTANCE SESSIONS BE CONSISTENT STATEWIDE?

Assistance instructors receive group training on how to teach the session, materials to be presented, session structure, and content. Therefore, the sessions, while offered many times and in many locations, will be consistent statewide.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER A BEGINNING TEACHER RECEIVES ASSISTANCE?

After the beginning teacher receives assistance, he or she moves into the second assessment period. During this time, the teacher is given the opportunity to demonstrate competencies not previously shown during the first assessment. If BTAP requirements are not met during the second assessment, additional assistance is provided, and the teacher is assessed a third and final time. If the teacher still is unable to meet BTAP requirements after the three assessments, the teacher's file is reviewed before a final decision is made. The Department of Education cannot issue the five-year renewable teaching certificate if all BTAP requirements are not satisfied.

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